

TOOTING'S DEFENSIVE WALL HOLDS UNDER BLUES' PRESSURE

Tooting & Mitcham United 0, Wycombe Wanderers 0

SO NEAR, yet so far, Wycombe Wanderers lost their 100 per cent. Isthmian League record at the tenth time of asking at Sandy Lane, Tooting, on Tuesday evening.

It had to happen sometime . . . and they can at least take satisfaction in that it needed their opposition to fall back onto total defence in front of their home crowd, to prise a point away from them.

But nothing will make up for the utter frustration of it all! Tooting, renewing the rivalry of last season's Amateur Cup thrillers, never seemed interested in anything other than a share of the points.

BREAKAWAYS

Yet, like many strong defensive teams, their sole means of attack came via breakaways, which, if precise and swift, rarely looked goal possibilities.

The danger of these raids was perhaps exaggerated by Wycombe's need to race back to cover the threat. For often as many as nine men were upfield simultaneously pressing United's defence.

Scottish international full-back, Iain MacLean, returned for another crack at making his mark, in place of Ian Rundle, but took a while to settle down, with Delroy Rhoden, Tooting's menacing winger, challenging him.

The tactical change of the night was, however, the demotion of Keith Searle to the substitutes' bench, allowing Pritchard back after his jaunt with the Rest of the League, and Tony Horseman to retain a place in the forward line as centre-forward.

Despite Searle's recent sagging form, it was a brave move in any circumstances. But, "Bodger" fully justified manager Brian Lee's decision by leading his colleagues in 30 minutes of the most workmanlike football yet turned in by Wanderers this season.

A DRENCHING

Under drenching rain, the Blues' forward line used clever interplay to move near the home goal and promised to overrun Tooting's defensive wall.

Pritchard went painfully near to a breakthrough only to see the ball roll across the goalline, and, just before the interval whistle, Horseman also missed narrowly.

Wycombe's obvious disadvantage was their lack of height upfront. A terrier-like four-man attack — Anthony, Pritchard, Horseman and Hutchinson — was dwarfed by the strapping six-footers of Tooting.

But this was no David and Goliath duel. Wanderers only needed the run of the ball to go their way just once in the early minutes and Tooting might well have collapsed as Sutton had done earlier in the season.

With nothing but the promise of a hatful in the second period to show by half-time, Wycombe withstood Tooting's push for a goal at the resumption, and soon took over again.

CORNER THREAT

Horseman, not clicking quite so well after the interval, hit the outside of a post with his 14th minute corner kick, and then sent the ball back over threateningly, for Fairbrother to clear.

The South Londoners' use of the offside trap added to Wycombe's growing frustration, yet it could be and often was, broken. Proving the point, Pritchard forced a home defender to block a shot on the linc.

And, with Tooting reeling, Anthony could feel hard done by when sandwiched by two hefty opponents inside the area. Referee Pond gave United the benefit of whatever doubt their may have been and waved play on.

Not to be put off, Geoff floated a fine 75th minute cross over from the right, the move ending with another goaline clearance, this time by Fairbrother, covering Pritchard's shot.

As time ticked by, so Wycombe substituted Searle for Horseman seven minutes from the final whistle. Whether it might have been worthwhile to risk pulling off a midfield man instead of Tony and forcing matters further with five forwards, will never be known.

The home defence, however, stood firm to claim the first point to be withheld from Wycombe in ten outings. Tuesday's result completes a strange double for the Sandy Lane men, who held second-in-the-table Hendon to a 1-1 draw last Saturday. It also repeated the goalless scoreline of a somewhat duller clash at Tooting last term.

M.W.

TOOTING: J. Fairbrother; B. Feeney, K. Baker; P. Gaydon, R. Taylor, A. Phillips; D. Hutchins, E. Yorke, J. Eales, C. Barrett, D. Rhoden.

WYCOMBE WANDERERS: J. Maskell; I. MacLean, K. Blunt; E. Powell, J. Delaney, B. Baker; G. Anthony, L. Pritchard, A. Horseman (sub. K. Searle, 83 min.), B. Bremer, J. Hutchinson.

Referee: D. F. Pond.

ISTHMIAN LEAGUE

Leading positions after Tuesday's matches

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Wycombe	10	9	1	0	28	5	19
Hendon	10	7	2	1	30	10	16
Enfield	9	6	2	1	14	4	14
Oxford C.	10	5	2	3	19	10	12